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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Mideast
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Key stories in the media:

The media say that today's meeting between Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh that will focus on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and implementation of the disengagement from Gaza will be overshadowed by the failure of two meetings between Israeli and Palestinian officers Wednesday to finalize the details of an agreement on the transfer of security responsibility in Jericho to the PA. Israel Radio quoted Egyptian FM Ahmed Abu el-Gheit as saying that one of the purposes of the Mofaz-Mubarak meeting is to find out why Israel is delaying the pullout from Palestinian cities. Ha'aretz quoted senior IDF officers as saying that Egypt's mediation between the PA and Hamas does not help to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Major media (lead story in Jerusalem Post) reported that the Right is targeting PM Sharon in the illegal outpost scandal. Jerusalem Post recalls that "U.S. Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer was going nowhere in trying to wade through the complex maze of issues surrounding the outposts," and that the U.S. had considered sending a team of its own to do the work. The newspaper quoted sources among the Likud "rebels" as saying Wednesday that if Sharon's Gaza Strip withdrawal plan cannot be stopped politically, then legal means will be used to try to incriminate Sharon and force him to resign before the disengagement can take place.

Maariv reported that the Legal Forum for the Land of Israel, a group of lawyers and accountants voluntarily helping the Gaza Strip settlers, has recently completed an architectural plan for relocating all of the Katif Bloc settlements to the area of the Nitzanim sand dunes between Ashkelon and Ashdod. Ha'aretz reported that delegations of rabbis and Jewish public figures and activists from the U.S. are expected in the coming weeks to visit the Katif Bloc settlements with the aim of expressing solidarity with residents slated for evacuation under the disengagement plan. Maariv reported that Agrexco, the government company for agricultural exports, has found that the evacuation of the Gaza Strip and the halt in the agriculture production of the Katif Bloc will cause the state fiscal losses of 120 million shekels (about USD 27.9 million) a year.

All media reported that on Wednesday, Shas party mentor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef played down the comments he made Tuesday against Sharon. Jerusalem Post quoted a senior source in the Prime Minister's Office as saying that Rabbi Yosef's comments "are the wrong words in the wrong atmosphere."

Israel Radio reported that this morning, security forces killed a senior Islamic Jihad militant who was barricading himself in a building near Baka el-Sharkiyeh, east of the Green Line. He was allegedly involved in the February 25 Tel Aviv bombing.

Ha'aretz reported that anti-aircraft units from the U.S. Army and the IDF will hold an extensive joint anti-aircraft exercise in Israel today. The forces will practice the coordinated operation of anti-aircraft systems, including the Arrow anti-ballistic interceptor

missile and the Patriot air defense missiles.

Maariv reported that MK Ahmed Tibi (Hadash-Ta'al) met last month in Washington with senior State Department officials, requesting that U.S. aid to Israel be conditioned upon 20 percent of it being allotted to the Israeli-Arab sector.

Citing AP, Ha'aretz quoted the family of British filmmaker James Miller as saying that the IDF has decided not to prosecute the soldier responsible for Miller's May 2003 death in the Gaza Strip.

All media reported that Omar Karamah is expected to return to the post of Lebanese PM, from which he had resigned last month, and that a 100,000-strong pro-Assad, "people power" demonstration took place in Damascus Wednesday. Israel Radio reported that Walid Jumblatt, Lebanon's most prominent opposition figure, is visiting Moscow. Yediot headlined that the "independence Intifada" in Lebanon was on the decline.

Yediot reported that the director general of the Jordanian Health Ministry told Aharon Cohen, president of the Contractors Association, that Israeli construction companies will build a hospital in Jordan.

Yediot cited a New York Times report that that a federal investigation committee led by retired judge Laurence Silberman found that the U.S. intelligence agencies know too little about the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea.

Leading media (banner in Yediot) note that the dollar's exchange rate -- 4.299 shekels Wednesday -- is at its lowest point in two years.

Erratum: A sentence in Wednesday's media reaction report was incomplete. It should have read: "Ha'aretz reported that Shalom asked Secretary Rice that there be no shift in the West's stance on Hamas, even if Hamas participates in the Palestinian elections as a political party, and that Rice promised that the U.S. position has not changed."

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "In all likelihood, Israel's eastern border will be a lot closer to the Green Line than it believes.... More so than anything, the Sasson report should be seen as the beginning of a new era."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "[The present situation of the settlers] is a result of [successive Israeli governments'] failing to craft a coherent policy in deciding exactly which areas over the former 1967 borders are essential to this country's security and national interests."

Nationalist columnist Uri Dan wrote in popular, populist Maariv: "As far as the Jews in the Land of Israel [Israel, including the territories] are concerned, there is no such thing as 'illegal outposts,' because Jews have the right to settle everywhere."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Game Is Up"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 10): "If there is one thing that the Sasson report [on illegal settler outposts] teaches us more than anything, it is the fact that the game is up, and the era of settlement establishment has finally come to an end. The reason for this is that the principal patron of the settlement movement became prime minister, and began taking world public opinion into consideration.... The insistent demand from Washington to afford the Palestinian state to be established with 'territorial contiguity' that will not be hampered by settlements, coupled with the fact that George Bush and Condoleezza Rice make sure of mentioning this expression at every opportunity, will lead in the end to the evacuation of all the settlements that get in the way of acceptable contiguity. In all likelihood, Israel's eastern border will be a lot closer to the Green Line than it believes.... More so than anything, the Sasson report should be seen as the beginning of a

new era. The timing of the evacuation of the outposts -- before or after the disengagement -- pertains primarily to the operational ability of the police and army to deal with their evacuation now, and is not the main issue."

II. "The Sasson Report"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 10): "The settlement movement and its supporters ... have long advocated a policy of 'a hill at a time,' which to a considerable degree has succeeded in creating 'facts on the ground' in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]. Unfortunately, this approach has also led them to often adopt an 'end justifies the means' approach, as evident in the practices described by the Sasson Report. However, whatever short-term advantages this has gained the settlement movement, it has cost them in the long-term in both local and international support. A legitimate case be made for much of the settlement activity in Judea and Samaria, but not if it is carried out as part of an end run around official procedures and the law. But more so, it is the government itself, the current one and almost every one preceding it for the past decade, that allowed this situation to develop. This is a result of failing to craft a coherent policy in deciding exactly which areas over the former 1967 borders are essential to this country's security and national interests, and what action should be taken to ensure eventual Israeli sovereignty there. Disengagement, in a way, is an attempt to take such a decision retroactively, and for that reason is all the more wrenching."

III. "A Libel"

Nationalist columnist Uri Dan wrote in popular, populist Maariv (March 10): "As far as the Jews in the Land of Israel are concerned, there is no such thing as 'illegal outposts,' because Jews have the right to settle everywhere. The right term could be 'unauthorized outposts' -- i.e. those that were not lawfully authorized by the legal government, or those that the government has decided to evacuate.... Only in Israel can government shoot a bullet in its own head, as some legal officials and judges are enthused about the fact that the International Court of Justice will value them as the prophets of universal justice. A country that began with an immigration that the British defined as 'illegal,' and in which [Attorney Talia] Sasson expounds her belief that the settlement drive is 'illegal,' could end up as an illegal country."

12. Syrian-Lebanese Track:

Summary:

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "In the long range the problem can only be resolved in a real -- apparently imposed -- reform, including democratic elections that would return the Sunnis to power [in Syria]."

Block Quotes:

"The Assad Family's Tricks Continue"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 10): "Bearing in mind the series of Syrian ruses in Lebanon, including the one that is still to occur, the entire issue of negotiations with Israel appears under a different light. Many Israelis now understand that public Syrian declarations are not necessarily true and that, as in Lebanon, each Syrian move is only meant to protect regime and community interests at the most basic level -- all the more so considering the fact that both countries -- Israel and Lebanon -- lack legitimacy in Damascus's eyes, by their very nature. They are supposed to be parts of 'Greater Syria.' As far as Syria is concerned, the same *modus operandi* applies to both countries: dispatching Syria-subordinated terrorists in order to impose dictates.... The U.S. has not yet decided what to do against Bashar Assad's defiant regime on the eve of the elections for the Lebanese parliament. But it would be fair to assume that should the Syrians pull out from Lebanon, they would still run their apparatus by remote control. This is what they do with the Palestinians. At this

time, international pressure -- including isolation and ostracism -- should no doubt be applied to the Damascus regime. However, in the long range the problem can only be resolved in a real -- apparently imposed -- reform, including democratic elections that would return the Sunni majority to power [in Syria].... Only then will it be possible to reach a true cessation of Syria's involvement in Lebanon, the end of the support for the Palestinian terrorist organizations, and the creation of the first opportunity of a true Israeli-Syrian arrangement. It appears that the only things that can be expected until then are deceptions."

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